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ABSTRACT

Transfer of knowledge and skills from the classroom to real life settings is an essential goal of any educational program. A study of microcounseling skills possessed by graduate students examined their interactions with classmates in a role playing situation. All students participated in skills training, responded to videotaped client vignettes, and were then assigned to one of four levels of simulated performance assessment stimuli. Data showed no significant differences among the experimental conditions. Interview experience did not enhance or detract from subject skill performance. When trainees acquired the particular skill, they tended to use that skill with a client believed to be seeking counseling. Results suggest that other skill training methods should be examined for their influence on skill transfer. (JAC)

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Skill Transfer: An Educational Dilemma

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The goals of any educational program are to help students acquire knowledge and skills and also to facilitate the students' successful use of these skills and knowledge in "the real world." Such transfer of knowledge and skills from the classroom to natural settings is essential.

Mahon and Altmann (1977) cite several studies which failed to demonstrate that skills acquired during teacher training transferred to classroom settings. Ford (1979), in his extensive review of the literature on training counselors and clinicians, points to the deficit of research examining whether counselor behaviors demonstrated during training are later manifested in interviews with individuals seeking counseling. While counselor training literature is replete with analogue studies that testify to the positive, immediate impact of various training models (Ford, 1979; Manley, 1974), the issue of skill transfer from the in-class, initial assessment to other more complex, out-of-class assessment situations has received little attention.

If one looks at an assessment procedure as part of the learning process, then concern about it being a positive learning experience becomes important. Gagné (Wittrock, 1968) presents a model of hierarchical learning where assessment on task A becomes part of the learning process as measured by task B. Gagne believes that learning sets should be so arranged that "subordinate learning sets mediate positive transfer to the learning set of the next higher order in the hierarchy" (p. 177). Lower order tasks, those of lesser difficulty, if presented first, will facilitate performance on the higher order tasks, thus increasing the

probability of skill transfer. Research, having its foundation in the theory of hierarchical learning, needs to address the impact of the order of presentation of various performance assessment stimuli on skill transfer.

As Froehle (1976) has pointed out, assessment of performance can be across three dimensions—symbolic, simulated, and real situations. In the counselor training literature, the most frequently utilized dimension has been the simulated dimension. That is, trainees often demonstrate their competence in response to roleplaying classmates or coached clients (Miller, 1969; Frankel, 1971; Wallace et al., 1975; Uhlman et al., 1976), to videotaped or audiotaped vignettes (Eisenberg & Delaney, 1970; Kima, 1975; O'Connell, 1974; Parish & Robinson, 1979; Robinson, Froehle, & Kurpius, 1979a, 1979b), or to a videotaped simulated client interview (Reddy, 1969, Robinson, 1978, Ronnestad, 1977). None of these studies has investigated whether these types of simulated performance assessment stimuli facilitate counselor skill performance with an individual in a counseling session. Robinson (1978) did examine the ordering effect of videotaped vignettes and of a videotaped simulated client; however, she did not test skill transfer to a counseling situation with an in vivo client.

This study is designed to be an extension of Robinson's work in that the presentation and ordering of simulated assessments prior to a counseling interview will be examined. Specifically, does interacting with a classmate in a roleplaying interview enhance trainee skill transfer to a counseling interview with a nonclassmate? Does combining roleplaying and a simulated client further facilitate skill transfer?

Methods

Subjects and Design

Twenty-nine master degree students who were enrolled in the initial counseling course, Introduction to Helping Relations, served as subjects for this study. The five males and twenty-four females, ranging in age from 21 to 45 with a mean age of 30, were novice trainees who had no formal training in counseling nor had been involved as counselors in job settings. Seven class members who were experienced counselors were not included in this study.

The subjects were randomly assigned to the four treatment conditions of the simulated performance assessment stimuli. This CR-4 design (Kirk, 1968) allows for testing for global differences as well as specific cell by cell comparisons to answer the questions of particular concern.

Independent Variables

All subjects participated in skills training, responded to 16 videotaped client vignettes, and then became involved in their assigned level of the treatment condition. The four levels of simulated performance assessment stimuli were: (1) videotaped simulated client (SC); (2) role-playing classmate (RP); (3) videotaped simulated client then roleplay (SC/RP); and (5) a control. Subjects then counseled a nonclassmate client.

Simulated Client. A 34 year old male helped to create a 15-minute videotape on which he discussed both family and career concerns. During his monologue, he pauses eleven times so that those viewing the tape can respond to what he has said. His pauses are 20 seconds in duration.

Roleplaying. This treatment condition consisted of female classmates, who had completed their involvement in the study, serving as clients to their peers. Each roleplaying classmate was given a handout describing

the client they were to roleplay. The client, Sally, was 19 years old, a sophomore, and the youngest girl in a family of five. Her presenting problem was "my boyfriend wants me to quit school and get married. I would have to quit because my folks wouldn't help anymore and we couldn't afford it. But I'm just not sure it's a good idea. I love him but I keep wondering how it would all work out." Each classmate roleplayed Sally for 15 minutes. Although the client problem was scripted, no attmept was made to control client talk time in terms of duration and frequency of utterances.

Simulated Client/Roleplaying. Subjects in this condition initially interacted with the simulated client videotape and they then worked with a roleplaying classmate.

Control. The control subjects received no simulated performance assessment experiences prior to interviewing a nonclassmate seeking counseling.

Skills Training Procedures

All subjects had, previous to this study, received training in use of the microcounseling (Ivey, 1971) skills of attending, paraphrasing and questioning. This training was accomplished through use of self-instructional skills packages developed and extensively researched with respect to their effectiveness and efficiency (Robinson, 1978; Robinson, Froehle, & Kurpius, 1979b).

Since the specific counseling skill of reflection of feelings and content was to be employed as the dependent variable, mastery of this skill was assessed prior to subjects receiving the different simulated performance assessment stimuli. This assessment was to assure equivalence

among trainees' abilities to respond helpfully to feeling statements prior to the inception of the study.

The self-instructional skills package consisted of a videotape which each subject watched individually and interacted with the videotaped clients when appropriate. The four components of the videotape were: (1) a brief introduction to the skill of reflecting; (2) a five-minute counseling session where the counselor modeled effective reflections of feeling and content; (3) a self evaluation component which consisted of a series of client statements, pauses for subjects to verbally practice, correctness cues indicating the relevant feelings in the client statement, and pauses for subject self-evaluations based on the correctness cues; and (4) a set of client vignettes which served as the assessment component for the training.

The assessment of skill performance was through rater analyses of the subjects' responses to the 16 videotaped client vignettes. Not only was the quantity of correct responses evaluated, but each subject response was evaluated on the qualitative dimensions of feeling appropriateness and content relevance (Robinson, 1978; Robinson et al., 1979a, 1979b). Each subject response was initially rated as to whether it was a reflection of feelings (Yes=1, No=0). Then, if it was categorized as a reflection of feeling, it was rated for feeling appropriateness on a scale of one to four, with four being assigned to an accurate, appropriate feeling. Regardless of the initial rating for reflection of feeling, all subject statements were rated for reflection of content. A one to four scale was used with a four representing a concise, and appropriate reflection of relevant content. Ratings for the quantitative and the two qualitative measures were each summed to produce three scores per subject.

Two master degree students were trained as raters for this phase of the study. Their agreement for quantity was 98%. The intraclass reliability coefficients (Ebel, 1951) for feeling appropriateness and content relevance were .92 and .90, respectively.

Nonclassmate Client

Four actresses from the drama department were hired to serve as the clients in this study. These actresses were coached to act as a 24 year-old client who was struggling with an impending divorce. She had concerns about her 18 month old son, her job, returning to school, and her marriage breaking up. The client role was such that a diversity of emotions could be conveyed. Following the suggestions of Larabee and Froehle (1979), the actresses were requested to generate ten statements across all interviews so that all trainees would have an equal opportunity to respond reflectively.

Subjects believed that this was a client who had sought counseling at the Counselor Training Center. They further believed that their purpose was to be helpful to this client for 15 minutes.

Dependent Variable

As stated above, the microcounseling skill chosen as the dependent variable was reflection of feelings and content. Understanding the affective components along with the cognitive components of the client's statements and communicating this understanding back to the client is viewed as a basic skill necessary for all counselors (Benjamin, 1974; Ivey, 1971; Hackney & Cormier, 1979; Brammer, 1973; Egan, 1974).

All subject interviews with the nonclassmate were audiotaped and then rated for reflection responses. As with their responses to the videotaped

vignettes, subject responses were rated on three dimensions: (a) quantity of produced reflection responses (each response rated yes/no); (b) feeling appropriateness, the degree to which the subject reflected the predominant feelings being conveyed by the nonclassmate client (each reflection response rated on a 1 to 4 Likert-type scale); and (c) content relevance, the degree to which the subject focused on the pertinent content in each client statement (each reflection response rated on a 1 to 4 Likert-type scale). Two trained raters assessed to be consistent at 100% for quantity, .88 for feeling appropriateness, and .90 for content relevance (Ebel, 1951) rated the audiotapes of the nonclassmate counseling session. Each rater was randomly assigned half of the tapes.

Even though the actress clients had been instructed to make at least ten specific emotional statements, in reality this did not occur. It was found that clients made between five and sixteen emotion laden statements during their counseling sessions. To help control for this variability, the raters judged each client statement as to whether it could elicit a reflection of feeling response. If the client statement received a "yes" rating, then the three dimensions of the counselor response were rated. The quantity measure was not used as a dependent measure since it was contaminated by the client's behavior. An average quality of feeling appropriateness was obtained by dividing the total feeling appropriateness rating by the quantity score for counselors $\overline{FA} = \frac{FA}{QC}$. An average quality of content relevance was obtained by dividing the total content relevance score by the number of client statements rated yes $\overline{CA} = \frac{FA}{QCI}$. These two averages served as the dependent measures in the data analysis.

Procedures

Prior to the experiment, all subjects received self-instructional skills training on reflection responses. Subjects then received treatment which was administered individually and privately in small counselor training lab rooms. Upon arrival to the training site, subjects received a handout outlining the experiences they were to receive. A naive research assistant seated them in their counseling room. After subject viewing of the self-instructional training tapes, the assistant introduced the subjects to their nonclassmate client.

The exact procedures after skills training were:

1. Control subject - 15-minute session with client
2. SC subjects - 15-minute simulated client videotape, then 15-minute session with client
3. RP subjects - 15-minute roleplay with classmate, then 15-minute session with client
4. SC/RP - 15-minute simulated client videotape, 15-minute roleplay with classmate, then 15-minute session with client

Results

To determine the equivalence of the subject's ability to produce reflection responses prior to the experiment, a MANOVA was calculated on the three dependent measures made on the subject's responses to the client vignettes. MANOVA is considered the most appropriate data analysis procedure for correlated multiple dependent measures (Cohen & Burns, 1976; Tatsuoka, 1970). The MANOVA results were nonsignificant, $F(9,56) = .90$, $p < .54$. An examination of the cell means and standard deviation in Table 1 indicate a ceiling effect for quantity and good overall quality

ratings for feeling appropriateness and content relevance. As is typical, the greatest standard deviations are evidenced by the Control group.

The average feeling appropriateness ($\overline{FA}$) and content relevance ($\overline{CR}$) measures were also analyzed by a MANOVA. Once again the results were nonsignificant, $F(6,48) = 1.49$, $p < .20$. Cell means and standard deviations reveal an above average quality for $\overline{FA}$ for all groups and for the three treatment groups for $\overline{CR}$ (See Table 2).

Table 1. Cell means and standard deviations for subject responses to client vignettes

	Quality		Feeling Appropriateness		Content Relevance	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
SC/RP n = 7	14.23	1.27	54.57	5.50	44.29	5.31
RP n = 7	15.43	1.13	56.00	6.32	45.00	7.42
SC n = 7	14.42	2.64	51.86	12.93	44.00	11.82
Control n = 8	13.25	2.92	44.75	14.85	39.38	11.99

Table 2. Cell means and standard deviations for average feeling appropriateness ($\overline{FA}$) and average content relevance ($\overline{CR}$)

	$\overline{FA}$		$\overline{CR}$	
	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD
SC/RP n = 7	2.71	1.36	2.36	.90
RP n = 7	2.57	1.17	2.30	.52
SC n = 7	3.57	.27	2.73	.60
Control n = 8	2.70	1.22	1.84	.55

Discussion

This study was an initial step toward investigating the concept of skill transfer. Although no significant differences were found among the experimental conditions, the findings are of import to counselor educators. It is interesting to note that interviewing experiences, such as roleplaying with a classmate and responding to a structured client situation like the simulated videotaped client, neither enhanced or detracted from subjects' skill performance. Once the trainees have acquired the skill, they do tend to use it with a client whom they believe is seeking counseling.

It seems that several studies need to grow out of this study. Perhaps other skill training methods could be examined for their influence on skill transfer and whether they are significantly enhanced by additional simulated performance assessment stimuli such as those used in

this study. Although attempts were made to control client behavior, this variable needs to be further contained in order to objectively measure transfer. Also, other simulated experiences need to be investigated as to their impact on skill transfer.

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Roleplaying Client - Intake Form

Name: Sally Sievert Age: 19

Marital Status: Single Class: Sophomore

Major: Undeclared GPA: 3.04

Family History:

Name	Relation	Age	Education
John	Father	45	H.S.
Martha	Mother	45	H.S.
Jeff	Brother	22	College
Judy	Sister	22	H.S.

Reason for Visit:

"My boyfriend wants me to quit school and get married. I would have to quit because my folks wouldn't help anymore and we couldn't afford it. But I'm just not sure it's a good idea. I love him but I keep wondering how it would all work out."

CASE

23 year old Female
Married 4 years
1 child, son, age 18 months (or so)
Working as a secretary

Doesn't like her job (means to an end)
loves child but is frustrated with the constant responsibilities
wants to go back to school
wants out of marriage, but doesn't know how or what to do about it
wants to establish more friendships
In general, feels stymied at what direction her life is going in right now, is in need of venting these feelings, and is somewhat apprehensive about doing so. (Caught between a rock and a hard place).

Emotions or Feelings:	Be Conscious of:
Frustration Pride Anger Guilt Loneliness Enthusiasm Apprehension Fear Relief	Dress and appearance, motor behavior (show congruent affect and feelings). Facial expression, eye contact, voice intensity, pitch, tone and rate. We need have you non-verbally, as well as verbally show cues of the emotion or feeling being expressed without over acting.

The following are 10 statements you must incorporate into the 15 minute session with the student. Given the history of your role, you are to create your own specifics, i.e. names, ambitions, hobbies, schools, etc. and interweave however you may choose, the statements below. Feel free to change your story whenever and however you wish, but make sure these 10 statements are always included.

1. There are times at my job when I just feel that screaming. (Frustration)
2. My son is just learning how to run; you should see him, he's soooo cute. (Pride)
3. I want to go back to school, but my husband won't let met. (Anger)
4. I know I'm a good mother, but sometimes I think I'll go crazy if I don't get away and spend some time by myself. (Guilt)
5. I hardly have any friends anymore. (Loneliness)
6. It would be so neat to be back in school again. (Enthusiastic)
7. I'd love to see what he'd (husband) do without me. (Anger)
8. It would be so different to be on my own. (Apprehension)
9. I know it's going to be really hard to tell him how I feel... I'm afraid of what he might do. (Fear)
10. It sure makes it easier to get this off my chest. (Relieved)